

A Tree in the Forest

PART 2

by Ajahn Chah

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PART 2

"All the teachings are merely similes and comparisons, means to help the mind see the truth."

Similes

A Hundred of Everything

People only think about the pleasure of acquiring and don't consider the trouble involved. When I was a novice I used to talk to the lay people about the happiness of wealth and possessions, having servants and so on - a hundred male servants, a hundred female servants, a hundred cows, a hundred buffaloes . . . a hundred of everything. The lay people really liked that. But can you imagine looking after a hundred buffaloes, or a hundred cows, not to mention the two hundred servants? Would that be fun? People do not consider this side of things. They have the desire to possess, to have the cows, the buffaloes and the servants, hundreds of them. But I say fifty buffaloes would be too much. Just twining the rope for all those brutes would already be one big headache! But people don't consider this. They just want to acquire as much as they can.

Ants' Nest

When we sit in meditation we want the mind to become peaceful, but it doesn't. We don't want to think, but we think. It's like a person who is sitting on an ants' nest. The ants just keep on biting him. Why? Because when the mind is in the world, then even though a person is sitting still with his eyes closed, all he sees is the world.

Pleasure, sorrow, anxiety, confusion, they all arise, because he still hasn't realized Dhamma. If the mind is like this, the meditator can't endure the worldly dhammas, he can't investigate. It's just the same as if he were sitting on an ants' nest. The ants are going to bite because he's right on their home. So what should he do? He should look for a way to get rid of them.

Apple Orchard

If you ask people why they were born, they probably would have a lot of trouble answering, because they're sunk in the world of the senses and sunk in becoming. For example, suppose we had an orchard of apple trees that we were particularly fond of. That's becoming for us if we don't reflect with wisdom. How so? Suppose our orchard contained a hundred apple trees and we considered them to be our trees. We'd then be born as a worm in every single one of them, and we'd bore into every one of them. Even though our human body may still be back at the house, we'd wend out tentacles into every one of those trees. It's becoming because of our clinging to the idea that those trees are our own, that that orchard is our own. If someone were to take an axe and cut on of the trees down, we would die along with the tree. We'd get furious and would have to go and set things straight. We'd fight and even kill over it. The quarrelling is the birth. We are born right at the point where we consider anything to be our own, born from the becoming. Even if we had a thousand apple trees, if someone were to cut down just one, it would be like cutting the owner down. Whatever we cling to, we are born right there, we exist right there.

Apples

You can begin doing away with selfishness through giving. If people are selfish they do not feel good about themselves. And yet people tend to be very selfish without realizing how it affects them. You can experience this at any time. Notice it when you are hungry. If you get a couple of apples and then the opportunity arises to share them with someone else, a friend, for instance, you think it over. Really, the intention to give is there, but you only

want to give away the smaller one. To give the big one, well, it would be a shame. It's hard to thin straight. You tell your friend to go ahead and take one but then you say, "Take this!" and give him the smaller one. This is one form of selfishness, but people don't often notice it. Have you ever seen this? In giving, you really have to go against the grain. Even though you want to give the smaller fruit, you must force yourself to give the bigger one. Of course once you've given it to your friend, it feels so good. Training the mind by going against the grain in this way requires self-discipline. You must know how to give and how to give up and not nurture your selfishness. This is called going against the grain in a correct way.

Bamboo Shoots



No matter how much you like something you should reflect that it's uncertain. Like bamboo shoots: they may seem to be so delicious but you must tell yourself "not sure!" If you want to test out if it's sure or not, try eating them every day. Eventually you'll complain: "This doesn't taste so good anymore!" Then you'll prefer another kind of food and be sure that food is delicious. But you'll find out later that's "not sure" too. Everything is just "not sure."

Big Stick, Little Stick



People aren't able to see themselves outside of their problems because of wrong view. They're like the man who throws away a small stick and picks up a bigger one, thinking that the bigger stick will be lighter.

Blind Person



To know the taste of Dhamma, you will have to put the teaching into practice yourself. The Buddha didn't talk about the fruits of the practice in much detail because it's something one can't convey in words. It would be like trying to describe the different colors to someone who has been blind from birth. You couldn't do it. You could try, but it wouldn't serve much purpose.

Body and Its Charms



We are deluded by the body and its charms, but really it is foul. Suppose we didn't take a bath for a week. Could we bear to be close to each other? We'd really smell bad. When we sweat a lot, such as when we are working hard together, the smell is awful. We go back home and rub ourselves down with soap and water, and the fragrance of the soap replaces our bad body odor. Rubbing sweet-smelling soap on the body may make it seem fragrant, but actually the bad smell of the body is still there, temporarily suppressed. When the smell of the soap is gone, the smell of the body comes back again. Now we tend to think the body is beautiful, delightful and strong. We tend to think that we will never age, get sick or die. We are charmed and fooled by the body and so we are ignorant of the true refuge within ourselves. The true place of refuge is the mind.

Boiled Rice



The teachings of the Buddha can help us to solve our problems, but first we must practice and develop wisdom. It's like wanting to have boiled rice. We must first build a fire, wait until the water comes to a boil, and let the rice cook for as long as it needs to. We just can't throw rice into a pot of water and have boiled rice right away.

Brick Oven



If some sensation makes an impression on the mind, don't simply disregard it. It's like baking bricks. Have you ever seen a brick oven? They build a fire up about two or three feet in front of the oven so that all the smoke gets drawn into it, and none is left outside. All the heat then goes into the oven and the job gets done quickly. People who practice the Dhamma should be like a brick oven. All their feelings will then be drawn inwards to be turned into Right View. Seeing sights, hearing sounds, smelling odors, tasting flavors, and so on, the mind draws everything inwards. Feelings thus become experiences which give rise to wisdom.

Bridge



Let your mind be like a bridge which is steady, and not like the water that rises and falls underneath it.

Buddha Statue



Enlightenment does not mean to become dead like a Buddha statue. An enlightened person still thinks, however he knows that the thinking process is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and empty. Through practice we can see these things clearly. We need to investigate suffering and stop its causes. If not, wisdom can never arise. We must see things exactly as they are - feelings are just feelings, thoughts are just thoughts. This is the way to end all our problems.

Building a House and Dyeing Cloth

Only wanting to make merit without developing virtue is like building a beautiful house without preparing the area first. It wouldn't be long before the house would collapse. Or it's like wanting to dye a piece of cloth without washing it first. Most people do it like that. Without looking at the cloth, they dip it into the dye straight away. If the cloth is dirty, dyeing it makes it come out even worse than before. Think about it. Would dyeing a dirty old rag look good?

Yet this is how people are. They just want to perform good deeds, but don't want to give up wrongdoing. They still haven't understood that it is only when the mind is free of impurities that the mind can be peaceful. You have to look into yourself, look at the faults in your actions, speech and thoughts. Where else are you going to practice but in your actions, speech and thoughts?

Cars

All religions are like different cars all moving in the same direction. People who don't see it like that have no light in their hearts.

Cat

If defilements arise, you have to do something about them. Defilements are like a cat. If you give it as much food as it wants, it will constantly be coming around to look for more. But if one day it scratches you and you decide not to feed it anymore, it will finally not come around. Oh, yes, it will still come around meowing at first, but if you remain firm it will finally stop doing so. It's the same with the different defilements of your mind. If you do not feed them, they will not come around to disturb you again and again, and your mind will be at peace.

Chicken in a Coop

As the mind develops calm, it is held in check by that calm, just like a chicken that is put in a coop. Once inside the coop, the chicken is unable to wander outside, but it is still able to walk around within the confines of the coop. The action of walking to and fro doesn't lead to any great harm because the chicken is always inside the coop. Some people don't want to experience any feelings or thoughts when they meditate, but thoughts and feelings do arise. The awareness that is present when the mind is calm, however, keeps the mind from getting agitated. This means that whenever there are thoughts or sensations walking around in the mind, they do so within the coop of calm, and so cannot cause you any harm or disturbance.

Child

If you don't oppose and resist your mind, you just follow its moods. This is not right practice. It would be like indulging a child's every whim. Will that child be a good child? If the parents give their child everything it wishes is that good? Even if they do so at first, by the time it can speak they may start to spank it occasionally because they're afraid it'll end up spoiled and helpless. The training of your mind must be like this. Don't indulge its whims.

Crooked Tree

The essence of our practice is to watch intention and examine the mind. You must have wisdom. Don't discriminate. Don't get upset with others if they are different. Would you get upset at a small and crooked tree in the forest for not being tall and straight like some of the others? That would be silly. Don't judge other people. There are all varieties. No need to carry the burden of wishing to change them all. If you want to change anything, change your ignorance to wisdom.

Dirty Tray

Many people contend that since the mind is inherently pure, since we all have Buddha nature, it's not necessary to practice. But this is like taking something clean, like this tray, for example, and then I come and drop some dung on it. Will you say that this tray is originally clean, and so you don't have to do anything to clean it now?

Downstairs, Upstairs

We invent names for the sake of study, but actually nature is just as it is. For example, we are sitting here downstairs on this stone floor. The floor is the base. It's not moving or going anywhere. Upstairs is what has risen out of this floor. Upstairs is like everything that we see in our minds: form, feeling, memory, and thinking. They don't really exist in the way we presume they do. They are merely the conventional mind. As soon as they arise, they pass away again. They don't really exist in themselves.

Drops of Water

Keep your precepts. At first you'll make mistakes. When you realize it, stop, come back and establish your precepts again. Maybe you'll go astray and make another mistake. When you realize it, re-establish yourself. If you practice like this, your mindfulness will improve and become more consistent, just like the drops of water falling from a kettle. If we tilt the kettle just a little bit, the water drips out slowly - plop! . . . plop! . . . plop! If we tilt the kettle a little bit more, the drops fall faster - plop, plop, plop! If we tilt the kettle even further, the water doesn't drip anymore but turns into a steady stream. Where do the *plops* go? They don't go anywhere. They simply change into a steady stream of water. This is how your increasing mindfulness will be.

Duck

However much we want the body to go on living for a long, long time, it won't do that. Wanting it to do so would be as foolish as wanting a duck to be a chicken. When we see that that's impossible, that a duck has to be a duck, that a chicken has to be a chicken, and that the body has to be the body and get old and die, then we will find strength and energy when we have to face the changes of the body.

Earthworm

Some people come and ask me whether a person who's come to realize impermanence, suffering, and non-self would want to give up doing things altogether and become lazy. I tell them that's not so. On the contrary, one becomes more diligent, but does things without attachment, performing only actions that are beneficial." And then they say, "If everyone practiced the Dhamma, nothing could be done in the world, and there'd be no progress. If everyone became enlightened, nobody would have children and humanity would become extinct." But this is like an earthworm worrying that it would run out of dirt, isn't it?

Excrement Odor

No matter where you go in the world there is suffering. There is no escape from it as long as your mind is in the world. It would be like trying to escape the odor of a big pile of excrement by moving over to a smaller one. In big piles or little ones, the odor of excrement is exactly the same wherever you go.

Expensive Object

Suppose we come to possess a very expensive object. The minute it comes into our possession our mind changes: "Now where can I keep it? If I leave it here somebody might steal it." We worry ourselves into a state, trying to find a place to keep it. This is suffering. And when did it arise? It arose as soon as we understood that we had obtained something. That's where the suffering lies. Before we had obtained that object there was no suffering. It hadn't yet arisen because there was no object yet for the mind to cling to. The self is the same. If we think in terms of *my* self then everything around us becomes *mine*. And confusion follows. If there is no *I* and *my* then there is no confusion.

External Sore

People wonder why they have so many problems when they start cutting down on their desires. They can't figure out why they have to suffer so much. It was easier before, when they satisfied their desires, because then they were at peace with them. But that's just like a man who has an infection inside his body but only treats the sore outside on his skin.

Falling from a Tree

If we divide up the *Paticcasamuppada* as it is in the scriptures, we say Ignorance gives rise to Volitional Activities, Volitional Activities give rise to Consciousness, Consciousness gives rise to Mind and Matter, Mind and Matter give rise to the six Sense Bases, the Sense Bases give rise to Sense Contact, Sense Contact gives rise to Feeling, Feeling gives rise to Wanting, Wanting gives rise to Clinging, Cling gives rise to Becoming, Becoming gives rise to Birth, Birth gives rise to Old Age, Sickness, Death and all forms of sorrow. But in truth, when we come into contact with something we don't like, there is immediate suffering. The mind passes through the chain of the *Paticcasamuppada* so rapidly that we can't keep up.

It's like falling from a tree. Before we can realize what's happening - thud! - we've already hit the ground. Actually we pass by many twigs and branches on the way down, but it all happens so fast that we aren't able to count them nor remember them as we fall. It's the same with the *Paticcasamuppada*. The immediate suffering that we experience is the result of going through the whole chain of the *Paticcasamuppada*. This is why the Buddha exhorted his disciples to investigate and know fully their own mind, so that they could catch themselves before they hit the ground.

Falling Leaves

Our lives are like the breath, like the leaves that grow and fall. When we really understand about growing and falling leaves, we can then sweep the paths every day and have great happiness in our lives on this ever-changing earth.

Farmer and Mother

Wherever you are still lacking in your practice that's where you apply yourself. Place all your attention on that point. While sitting, lying down or walking, watch right there. It's just like a farmer who hasn't yet finished his field. Every year he plants rice, but this year he still hasn't gotten his planting finished, so his mind is always stuck on that. His mind can't rest happily because he knows his work is not yet finished. Even when he's with friends, he can't relax. He's all the time nagged by the thought of his unfinished field. Or it's like a mother who leaves her baby upstairs in the house while she goes to feed the animals below. She's always got her baby on her mind, for

fear something might happen to it. Even though she may be doing other things, her baby is never far from her thoughts. It's just the same for us in our practice. We should never forget it. Even though we may be doing other things, our practice should never be far from our thoughts. It should constantly be with us, day and night. It has to be like this if we're really going to make progress.

Football

Even though simply listening to the Dhamma might not lead to realization, it is beneficial. There were, in the Buddha's time, those who did realize the Dhamma, even became *arahants*, while listening to a discourse. They could be compared to a football. When a football gets air pumped into it, it expands. Now the air in that football is all pushing to get out, but there's no hole for it to do so. As soon as a needle punctures the football, however, all the air comes rushing out. This is the same as the minds of those disciples who were enlightened while listening to the Dhamma. As soon as they heard the Dhamma and it hit the right spot, wisdom arose. They immediately understood and realized the true Dhamma.

Friends

The Buddha didn't want us to follow this mind. He wanted us to train it. If it goes one way, go the other way. In other word, whatever the mind wants, don't let it have. It's like having been friends with someone for years, but we finally reach a point where our ideas are no longer the same. We no longer understand each other. In fact, we even argue too much and so we split up and go our separate ways. That's right, don't follow your mind. Whoever follows his mind follows its likes and desires and everything else. This means that that person has not yet practiced at all.

Fruit in Hand

It's of great importance to practice the Dhamma. If we don't practice it, then all our knowledge is only superficial knowledge, just the outer shell of it. It's as if we have some sort of fruit in our hand, but we don't eat it. Even though we have that fruit in our hand, we get no benefit from it. Only through the actual eating of the fruit will we really know its taste.

Fruit Tree

A tree matures, blossoms, and fruit appear and ripen. They then rot and the seeds go back into the ground to become new fruit trees. The cycle starts once more. Eventually there are more fruit which ripen and fall, rot, sink into the ground as seeds, and grow once more into trees. This is how the world is. It doesn't go very far. It just revolves around the same old things. Our lives these days are the same. Today we are simply doing the same old things we've always done. We think too much. There are so many things for us to get interested in, but none of them leads to true completion.

Garbage Can

Sometimes teaching is hard work. A teacher is like a garbage can that people throw their frustrations and problems into. The more people you teach the bigger the garbage disposal problem. Don't worry. Teaching is a wonderful way to practice Dhamma. The Dhamma can help all those who genuinely apply it in their lives. Those who teach grow in patience and in understanding.

Going Astray

People think that doing this and memorizing that, studying such-and-such, will cause suffering to end. But it's just like a person who wants a lot of things. He tries to amass as much as possible, thinning if he gets enough his suffering will get less. It's like trying to lighten your load by putting more things on your back. This is how people think, but thinking is astray of the true path, just like one person going northward and another going southward, and yet believing that they are going in the same direction.

Going Into Town

Some people get confused because these days it seems like there are so many teachers and so many different systems of meditation. But it's just like going into town. One can approach the town from many directions. Whether you walk one way or another, fast or slow, it's all the same. Often the different systems of meditation differ outwardly only. There's one essential point that all good practice must eventually come to - not clinging. In the end, you must let go of all meditation systems, even the teacher himself. If a system leads to relinquishment, to not clinging, then it is correct practice.

Good Digestion

Don't be in a hurry to get rid of your defilements. You should first patiently get to know suffering and its causes well, so that you can then abandon them completely, just as it's much better for your digestion if you chew your food slowly and thoroughly.

Grand Central Station

When it comes to practice, all that you really need to make a start are honesty and integrity. You don't have to read the *Tipitaka* to have greed, hatred and delusion. They are all already in your mind, and you don't have to study books to have them. Let the knowing spread from within you, and you will be practicing rightly. If you want to see a train, just go to the central station. You don't have to travel the entire Northern Line, Southern Line, Eastern and Western Lines to see all the trains. If you want to see trains, every single one of them, you'd be better off waiting at Grand Central Station. That's where they all terminate. Some people tell me that they want to practice but don't know how, or that they're not up to studying the scriptures, or that they're getting old, so that their memory's not so good any more. Just look right here, at *Grand Central Station*. Greed arises here, anger arises here, delusion arises here. Just sit here and you can watch all these things arise. Practice right here, because right here is where you're stuck, and right here is where the Dhamma will arise.

Hair in Your Soup

Why does the body attract you and you get attached to it? Because your body-eye sees and not your heart-eye. The real nature of our body is that it is not clean, not pretty, but impermanent and decaying. See the body like a hair in your soup. Is it pretty? See clearly that the body is nothing but earth, fire, water and air - nobody there. You only fall down when you want to make it beautiful.

Hair that Hides a Mountain

Our opinions, attachments, and desires are like a hair that can hide a whole mountain from our view, because they can keep us from seeing the most simple and obvious things. We get so caught up in our ideas, our self, our wants, that we can't see how things really are. And that's when even a hair can keep us from seeing a whole mountain. If we're attached to even a subtle desire, then we can't see that which is true, that which is always very obvious.

Hall

We are only visitors to this body. Just like this hall here, it's not really ours. We are simply temporary tenants, like the rats, lizards and geckos that live in it, but we don't realize this. Our body is the same. Actually the Buddha taught there is no abiding self within this body, but we believe it to be our self, as really being us. This is wrong view.

Handful of Mud

If you grab a handful of mud and squeeze it, it will ooze through your fingers. People who suffer are the same. When suffering has a squeeze on them, they, too, try to seek a way out.

Hen or Rooster?

Teaching people with different levels of understanding is very difficult. Some people have certain set ideas. You tell them the truth and they say it's not true: "I'm right, you're wrong!" There's no end to this. If you don't let go there will be suffering. It's like the four men who go into the forest and hear a rooster crowing. One of them wonders if it is a rooster or a hen. Three of them decide it's a hen, but the curious one insists it's a rooster. "How could a hen crow like that?" he asks. They answer, "Well, it has a mouth, doesn't it?" They argue and get really upset, but in the end they are all wrong. Whether you say a hen or a rooster, they're only names. We say a rooster is like this, a hen is like that. This is how we get stuck in the world! Actually if you just say that there's really no hen and no rooster, then that's the end of it.

Herbal Medicine

The theory of Dhamma is like a textbook on herbal medicine, and going out to look for the plants is like the practice. Having studied the book, we know what it says about herbal medicine, but we do not know what the actual herbs look like. All we have are some sketches and names. But if we already have the textbook on herbal medicine, we can then go looking for the plants themselves, and do so often enough so that we can recognize them easily when we see them. In this way we give the textbook value.

The reason we were able to recognize the various herbs is because we studied the textbook. The textbook on herbal medicine was our teacher. The theory of Dhamma has this kind of value. However, if we depend completely on practice and do not take time to learn, then it would be like going out looking for herbal plants without having first done some study. Without knowing what we were looking for, we would not succeed in finding any. So both theory and practice are important.

Host and Guests

Your mind is like the owner of a house and the feelings are like the guests that come and go. But have only one chair in your house so you can see each guest clearly. See the moods and emotions that come to bother you, then let them go. Keep mindfulness in every posture. If you just follow your moods, you won't see them.

Hot Iron Ball

The cultivators of old saw that there is only the arising and ceasing of dhammas. There is no abiding entity. They contemplated from all angles and saw that there was nothing stable. While walking or sitting, they saw things in

contemplated from all angles and saw that there was nothing stable. While walking or sitting, they saw things in this way. Wherever they looked, there was only suffering. It's just like a big iron ball which has just come out of a blast furnace. It's hot all over. If you touch the top, it's hot. If you touch the sides, they're hot. If you touch the bottom, it's hot, too. There isn't any place on it which is cool.

Hot Iron Bar and Candy

It is unlikely that we can really affect the state of mind of a dying person very much, either positively or adversely. It's like if I took a hot iron bar and poked you in the chest with it, and then I held out a piece of candy with my other hand. How much could the candy distract you? We should treat dying people with love and compassion and look after them as best we can, but if we don't turn it inwards to contemplate our own inevitable death, there is little real benefit for us.

Hotel

We are all born with nothing, and we die with nothing. Our house is like a hotel and so is our body. We'll have to move out of them both one day and leave them behind.

Householder

What is the mind? The mind doesn't have any form. That which receives impressions, both good and bad, we call *mind*. It is like the owner of a house. The owner stays at home while visitors come to see him. He is the one who receives the visitors. Who receives sense impressions? What is it that perceives? Who lets go of sense impressions? That is what we call *mind*. But people can't see it. They think themselves around in circles. "What is the mind, what is the brain?" Don't confuse the issue like that. What is that which receives impressions? Some impressions it likes and some it doesn't like. Who is that? Is there one who likes and dislikes? Sure there is, but you can't see it. That is what we call *mind*.

Ignorant Child

Actually, you know, we human beings, the way we do things, the way we live, the way we are, are really like little children. A child doesn't know anything. If an adult observes the actions of a child, the way it plays and jumps around, its actions don't seem to serve much purpose. If our mind is untrained, it is like a child. We speak without awareness and act without wisdom. We may degenerate but not know it. A child is ignorant and so it just plays as children do. Our ignorant mind is the same. That is why the Buddha taught us to train this mind of ours.

Infant

See like and dislike arising from sense contact, and do not attach to them. Don't be anxious for quick results or instant progress. An infant has to crawl first before he learns to walk and run. Be determined in practicing virtue and keep on meditating.

Itchy Head

If we don't know how to handle suffering when it arises, we won't be able to get any relief from it. It's just as if we have an itch on our head and we scratch our leg! If it's our head that's itchy, then we're obviously not going to get any relief by scratching our leg.

Key

If we take the precepts simply out of tradition, then even though the master teaches the truth, our practice will be deficient. We may be able to study the teachings and repeat them, but we have to practice them if we really want to understand. If we do not develop the practice, this may well be an obstacle to our penetrating to the heart of Buddhism, and we will not get to the heart of Buddhism, and we will not get to understand the essence of the Buddhist religion.

The practice is like a key to a trunk. If we have the right key in our hand, no matter how tight or strong the lock may be, when we take the key and turn it, the lock falls open. If we have no key, we won't be able to open the lock, and we will never know what is inside the trunk.

Lead for Gold

The *arahant* is really different from ordinary people. The things that seem true and valuable to us are false and worthless to an arahant. Trying to interest an arahant in worldly things would be like offering lead in exchange for gold. We think, "Here is a whole pile of lead, so why won't he want to trade his piece of gold which is so much smaller?"

Leaving an Old Friend

Greed, hatred and delusion are the causes of all our suffering. We must learn to overcome them and free ourselves from their control. This is very hard to do. It is like having the Buddha tell us to leave a friend we have known and loved from the time we were still children. It is not easy to make the separation.

Light Switch and Bowl

It is necessary to have concentration firmly established in our practice before wisdom can arise. To concentrate the mind can be likened to turning on a light switch, and wisdom to the light that appears as a result. If there were no switch, there would be no light. Likewise, concentration is like an empty bowl, and wisdom is like the food that you put in it. If there were no bowl, there would be no place to put the food.

Lizard

The sutra gives us the simile of a certain man trying to catch a lizard which had run into a termite mound. The mound had six holes in it. Now if the lizard had run in there, how could the man catch it? He would have to close off five of the holes, and leave just one hole open. Then he would have to sit and guard that hole. When the lizard ran out - bop! - he got it. Observing the mind is like this. Closing off the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue and the body, one leaves only the mind. To *close off* means to restrain the five senses, leaving only the mind to be observed. Meditation is the same as catching the lizard.

Lost Something

If you understand that good and bad, right and wrong, all lie within you, then you won't have to go looking for them somewhere else. Just look for them where they arise. If you don't, it'd be like losing something in one place and then going to look for it in another. If you lose something here, you must look for it here. Even if you don't find it at first, keep looking where you dropped it. But, usually, you lose it here, then go looking over there. When will you ever find it? Good and bad actions lie within you. One day you're bound to see it. Just keep looking right here.

Lotus Leaf

The Buddha said that the Enlightened Ones were far from defilements. This doesn't mean that they ran away from defilements. They did not. Defilements were there. He compared it to a lotus leaf in a pond of water. The leaf and the water exist together. They are in contact but the leaf doesn't become wet. The water can be compared to defilements and the lotus leaf to the enlightened mind. The mind of one who practices doesn't run anywhere. It stays right where it is. Good and evil, happiness and unhappiness right and wrong they all arise, and he knows them all. The meditator simply knows them, but does not allow them to wet his mind. In other words, he does not cling to any of them.

Lotuses

We can compare the mind to lotuses in a pond. Some of the lotuses are still stuck in the mud, some have grown through the mud but are still underwater, some have reached the surface of the water, and some have opened in the sun. Which lotus do you want to be? If you want to be below the surface, be careful - the fish and turtles will bite!

Lump of Ice v

How does the body decline? Consider a lump of ice. Originally it was simply water. We then freeze it and it

becomes ice for awhile, and then it melts and turns into water again. We can see how the ice declines much the same as the body. We all, without exception, are *lumps of deterioration*. When we are born we bring this inherent nature of dissolution with us. We can't avoid it. At birth we bring old age, sickness and death along with us. Right now the lump is hard, just like the lump of ice. But look at the body closely. It's ageing every day. It declines just like the lump of ice, following the way of nature. Soon, like the lump of ice, the body will melt away and be all gone, too.

Mango

We speak of wisdom and concentration as separate things, but in essence they are one and the same. They arise from the same place but take different directions. It's like a mango. A mango is first small and green. It then grows larger and larger until it is ripe. The small mango, the large one and the ripe one are the same mango, not different mangoes. Only its conditions have changed. In Dhamma practice, one condition is called concentration, and the later condition is called wisdom, but in actuality *samadhi* and *pañña* are both the same thing, just like the mango.

Market Lady

Don't be disappointed if you don't see quick results in your practice. What is important is simply to continue your practice with determination and perseverance. Don't give up so readily, like a market lady who wants to sell her goods and doesn't give up. She keeps on yelling, "Coconu-u-u-ts, rice c-a-a-akes! Get your coconuts and rice cakes here!" She's determined to sell them and won't give up until she does.

Meat

All that people want these days is money. They think that if they just get enough of it, everything will be all right. So they spend all their time looking for money. They don't look for goodness. This is like wanting meat, but not wanting salt to preserve it. You just leave the meat around the house to rot. Those who want money should know not only how to find it, but also how to look after it. If you want meat, you can't expect to buy it and then just leave it lying around the house. It'll just go rotten. Goodness arises from a cause. Whenever we create good actions, goodness arises in the mind. If we understand causes in this way, we can create those causes and the results will naturally follow. But people don't usually create the right causes. They want goodness so much and yet they don't work to bring it about. This kind of thinking is wrong, and the result of wrong thinking is rotten results - just turmoil and confusion.

Meat Between Your Teeth

It's hard to give up sensual pleasure. Consider sensual pleasure like eating some meat which gets stuck between your teeth. When you get it out, you feel some relief for a while. Maybe you even think that you won't eat any more meat. But when you see it again, you can't resist it. You eat some more and it gets stuck, you have to pick it out again, which gives some relief once more, until you eat some more meat. That's all there is to it. Sensual pleasures are just like this. When the meat gets stuck in your teeth, there's discomfort. You take a toothpick and pick it out and experience some relief. There's nothing more to it than this with sensual desire.

Millipede

If many people live together, as we do here in the monastery, they can still practice comfortably if their views are in harmony. It's not true to say that there will be disharmony just because there are many of us. Just look at a millipede. A millipede has many legs, doesn't it? Just looking at it you'd think it would have difficulty walking, but actually it doesn't. It has its own order and rhythm. In our practice it's the same. If we practice properly, even if we number in the hundreds or thousands, no matter how many we are, we will live in harmony.

Millipede and Chicken

Westerners are very "clever" and can't accept many principles of Dhamma. I once asked some learned people if they had ever seen a millipede. It has many legs, but how fast can it run? Can it outrun a chicken? No! Yet a chicken has only two legs. How come this animal with so many legs can't even keep up with a chicken?

Money, Wax, and Chicken Dung

Rules and conventions are established to make things more convenient, that's all. Let's take money, for example. In olden times, people used materials and goods to barter as money. But they were difficult to keep, so they started to use coins and notes. Perhaps in the future we'll have a new royal decree saying only lumps of wax can be used as money throughout the country, or chicken dung. Then people would start fighting and killing each other over wax or chicken dung. This is just the way it is. What we use for money is simply a convention that we have set up. It is money because we have decided it to be so, but in reality what is money? Nobody can say. When there is a popular agreement about something, then a convention comes about to fulfill the need. The world is just conventions.

But it is difficult to get ordinary people to understand this. Our money, house, family, our children and relatives are simply conventions that we have invented, and we really believe they are all ours, but seen in the light of

Dhamma, they don't belong to us. It's when we think that they do that we suffer.

Monkey

When we know that it is the nature of the mind to be constantly changing, we will understand it. We have to know when the mind is thinking good and bad, that it's changing all the time. If we understand this, then even while we are thinking we can be at peace. For example, suppose at home you had a pet monkey. Monkeys don't stay still for long. They like to jump around and grab onto things. That's how monkeys are. Now you come to the monastery and see the monkey here. This monkey doesn't stay still either, does it? It jumps around, too, but it doesn't bother you. Why doesn't it bother you? Because you are raising a monkey yourself so you know what they're like. If you know just one monkey, no matter how many provinces you go to, no matter how many monkeys you see, you won't be bothered by them, because you're someone who understands monkeys. If we understand monkeys, then we won't become like a monkey. If we don't understand monkeys, we may become like one ourselves. When we see it reaching for this and that, we shout, "Hey!" We get angry. But if we understand the nature of monkeys, we'll then see that the monkey at home and the monkey at the monastery are just the same. Why should we get annoyed by them? When we see what monkeys are like, that's enough. We can be at peace.

Nest of Red Ants

Sensual pleasure is like a nest full of red ants. We take a piece of wood and poke at the nest until the ants come running out, crawling down the wood and into our faces, biting our eyes and ears. And yet we still don't see the difficulty we are in. In the teaching of the Buddha, it is said that if we've seen the harm of something, no matter how good it may seem to be, we know that it's harmful. Whatever we haven't yet seen the harm of, we just think it's good. If we haven't yet seen the harm of anything, we can't get out of it.

Old Granny

Most people wait until they get old before they start going to a monastery and start practicing the Dhamma. Why do they leave it till they get old? It's like old grandma. You say, "Hey, Granny, let's go to the monastery!" "Oh, you go ahead," she answers. "My ears aren't so good anymore." You see what I mean? When she had good ears what was she listening to? Finally if she does go to the temple, she listens to the sermon but hasn't got an idea of what's being said. Don't wait until you're all used up before you start thinking of practicing the Dhamma.

Old Liar

Our habits try to deceive us over and over again, but if we remain aware of it, we will eventually be able to ignore them altogether. It's like having an old person come around and tell us the same old lies time after time. When we realize what he's up to, we won't believe him any longer. But it takes a long time before we realize it, because deception is always there.

Old Rag

If we see everything as uncertain, then their value fades away. All things become insignificant. Why should we hold onto things that have no value? We should treat things as we do an old rag that we keep only to wipe our feet with. We see all sensations as equal in value because they all have the same nature, that of being uncertain.

Paddy Worker

Practice consistently and not in spurts like the way some people work in their rice paddy. At first they work very hard and then they stop. They don't even bother to pick up their tools. They just walk off and leave them behind.

Later on when the soil has all caked up, they remember their work and do a bit more, only to leave it again shortly afterwards. Doing things this way you'll never get a decent paddy. Our practice is the same.

Party Revelers

People go through life blindly, ignoring death like revelers at a party feasting on fine foods. They ignore that later they will have to go to the toilet, so they do not bother to find out where there is one. When nature finally calls, they have no idea where to go and are in a mess.

Pedal Sewing Machine

When we sit in meditation, we only watch the breath. We don't try to control it. If we force our breath to be too long or too short, we won't feel balanced and our mind won't become peaceful. We must just let our breathing happen naturally. It's like using a pedal sewing machine. We can't force the pedal. We push it up and down and let it go naturally. If we force it, the sewing won't be smooth and easy. So before we actually start to sew anything, we first practice pedaling the machine to get our co-ordination right, then the machine can do its work naturally. Watching the breath is similar. We don't get concerned over how long or short, weak or strong it is. We just note it. We simply let it be natural and follow it.

Piece of Cake

If you still have happiness and still have suffering, you are someone who is still not yet full. It's as if you're eating a piece of your favorite cake, but before you can finish eating it, it falls out of your hand. You regret the loss, don't you? When you feel the loss, you suffer, don't you? So you need to throw away both happiness and suffering. They're only food for those who are not yet full. In truth, happiness is suffering in disguise, but in such a subtle form that you don't see it. If you cling to happiness, it's the same as clinging to suffering, but you don't despair, don't lose yourself in it. See that happiness and suffering have the same equal value.

Planting Fruit Trees

Our practice can be likened to planting fruit trees. As with fruit trees, it's possible to get fruit quickly by taking a cutting and planting it, but the tree won't be long-lasting or resilient. Another way is to take a seed and cultivate the tree right from the seed. In this way it will be strong and enduring. This is the same with our practice.

Poisonous Injection

There are two kinds of suffering: ordinary suffering and extra-ordinary suffering: ordinary suffering is the suffering that is the inherent nature of all conditioned phenomena. Extra-ordinary suffering is the kind that creeps in from the outside. Let's see how they differ by using the following example: Suppose you are sick and go to see a doctor. The doctor decides to give you an injection. When the needle pierces the skin, there is some pain, which is only natural. When the needle is withdrawn, the pain disappears. This is like the ordinary kind of suffering. It's no problem; everybody experiences it. The extra-ordinary kind of suffering is the suffering that arises from grasping onto things. This is like having an injection with a syringe filled with poison. This is no longer an ordinary kind of pain. It is the pain which ends in death.

Precious Pen

If you don't understand what peace is, you'll never be able to find it. For example, suppose you had a very expensive pen which you usually carry in the right front pocket of your shirt. But one day you put it somewhere else and forgot. Later when you reach for the pen in its usual place, it's not there. You get a fright. You think you've lost it. You get a fright because of wrong understanding. You don't see the truth of the matter and so you suffer as a result. Whatever you do, you can't stop regretting having lost your precious pen: "Such a shame! I spent so much money on it and now it's gone!" But then you remember, "Oh, of course! When I went to bathe I put the pen in the back pocket of my pants!" The moment you remember this you already feel better, even if you still haven't seen the pen. You no longer worry about it. And as you're walking along, you run your hand over your back pocket, and there it is. Your mind was deceiving you all along. The worry came from your ignorance. Now, seeing your pen again, you are beyond doubt, beyond worry. This sort of peace comes from seeing the cause of the problem, the cause of suffering. As soon as you remember that the pen was in your back pocket, your suffering ended. Knowing the truth brings peace.

Raging Tiger

This heart of ours is like a raging tiger that lives in a cage. If it can't get what it wants, it growls and makes trouble. It must be tamed with meditation. Our defilements are also like a raging tiger. This tiger we should put in a solid cage made of mindfulness, energy, patience, and endurance. We then don't feed it its habitual desires, and it'll slowly starve to death.

Red-Hot Coal and Bird

The household life is easy and difficult at the same time. It's easy to understand what to do, but difficult to do it. It's as if you were holding a piece of red-hot coal in your hand and came to me complaining about it. I'd tell you to simply let go of it, but you'd refuse saying, "I want it to be cold." Well, either you drop it, or you must learn to be very, very patient. "How can I just drop it?" you ask, "how can I just drop my family?" Just drop them in your heart. Let go of your attachment to them. Of course you still have obligations to your family. You are like a bird that has laid eggs. You have the responsibility to sit on them and look after them after they have hatched. Just don't think in terms of can I just drop my family?" Just drop them in your heart. Let go of your attachment to them. Of course you still have obligations to your family. You are like a bird that has laid eggs. You have the responsibility to sit on them and look after them after they have hatched. Just don't think in terms of my family. This kind of thinking is just another cause of suffering. Don't think either that your happiness depends upon whether you're living alone or with others. Just live with the Dhamma and find true happiness.

Restless Monkey

The mind out of control is like a restless monkey jumping here and there senselessly. You have to learn to control it. See the real nature of the mind: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and empty. Don't just follow it as it jumps around. Learn to master it. Chain it down and let it wear itself out and die. Then you have a *dead monkey*, and you're finally at peace.

Rivers and Streams

When people enter the stream of Dhamma, it's the one Dhamma. Even though they may come from different places, they harmonize, they merge. Just like the rivers and streams that flow to the sea . . . once they enter the sea, they all have the same taste and color. It's the same with people.

Rope

Trying to end suffering without first understanding the cause is like pulling on a rope that's stuck. You just pull the end of the rope over here. The other end of the rope is still stuck over there so it never comes. What to do to make it come? It does not come free because you never seek out the source, the root. You just get lost in pulling on this end. What is it stuck on? It must be stuck on something, and that's why it doesn't come. Go to the source, untie the knot, and be free.

Sand and Salt

Problems occur because people cling to conventions and what they suppose things to be. If you look closely, in the absolute sense, however, you will see that things don't really exist. Our house, our family, our money are simply conventions that we have invented. Seen in the light of Dhamma, they don't belong to us. Even this body is not really ours, and just because we suppose it to be so doesn't make it so.

It would be like taking a handful of sand and agreeing to call it salt. Would that make it salt? Well, yes, it would, but in name only and not in reality. You still wouldn't be able to cook with it, because no matter what you call it, it's still sand. Supposing sand to be salt doesn't make it so.

School boy

Practicing Dhamma is like a child learning to write. At first he doesn't write nicely – big, long loops and squiggles. He writes like a child. After a while the writing improves through practice. Practicing the Dhamma is like this. At first you are awkward, sometimes calm, sometimes not. You don't really know what's what. Some people get discouraged. But don't slacken off. Live with effort, just like the schoolboy. As he gets older he writes better and better. From writing badly he grows to write beautifully, all because of the practice from childhood.

Spillway

When you make a dam, you must make a spillway, too. Then when the water rises too high, the water can flow off safely. When it's full to the brim, you open your spillway. You have to have a safety valve like this. Understanding impermanence is the safety valve of the Noble Ones. If you also have this safety valve, you will also be at peace.

Splinter in Your Foot

The Buddha taught us to escape from suffering using wisdom. For example, suppose you had a splinter embedded in your foot. Sometimes you step on a stone that presses on the splinter, and it really hurts. So you feel around your foot. But not finding anything, you shrug it off and walk on a bit more. Eventually you again step on something else, and the pain is there again. This happens many times. What is the cause of that pain? The cause is that splinter in your foot. Whenever the pain arises, you may take a look and feel around a bit, but not seeing the splinter, you let it go. The pain recurs again and again until the desire to take it out is constantly with you. Finally it reaches a point where you make up your mind once and for all to get that splinter out – because it hurts! Our effort in the practice must be like this. Wherever it hurts, wherever there's friction, we must investigate. We must confront the problem head on and not just shrug it off. Just take the splinter out of your foot. Wherever your mind gets stuck you must take note. As you look into it, you will know it, see it and experience it as it is.

Stubborn Horse

The mind is as stubborn as a horse and as hard to train. What do you do when you've got a horse that's stubborn? Don't feed it for a while and it will soon come around again. And when it listens to your command, feed it a little. We can train the mind in the same way. With right effort, wisdom will arise.

Stump

You should get at the root causes of things. It's like you are going for a walk and you trip over a stump. So you get a hatchet and cut it, but it grows back and you trip over it again. So you cut it again. But it keeps n growing back. You'd better get a tractor and plow it up. But don't put it off. It's like saying to yourself, "Should I go today? Should I . . . ? Maybe I'll go tomorrow . . . ?" Then the next day, "Should I go, or shouldn't I?" And you keep on doing this day after day until you die and you never go anywhere. You've got to think, "Go!" and that's it!

Sweet Dessert

Practice is a matter of directly looking at the mind. This is wisdom. When you have examined and understood the mind, then you have the wisdom to know the limitations of concentration or books. If you have practiced and understood not clinging, you can then return to the books. They will be like a sweet dessert. They can help you to teach others. Or you can go back to practicing absorption, because now you have the wisdom to know not to hold onto anything.

Sweet Mango

Dhamma is in your mind, not in the forest. Don't believe others. Just listen to your own mind. You don't have to go and look anywhere else. Wisdom is in yourself, just like a sweet ripe mango is already in a young green one.

Sweet Papayas

Defilements can be useful if used skillfully. It's like taking chicken and buffalo dung and putting them into the ground to help make our papaya trees grown. Dung is filthy stuff, but when the trees give fruit, the papayas are so nice and sweet. Whenever doubt arises, for example, look at it, investigate right there. This will help your practice grow and bear sweet fruit.

Tape Recorder

If listening to Dhamma makes your heart peaceful, that's good enough. You don't need to make an effort to remember anything. Some of you may not believe this, but if your heart is peaceful and you just listen to what is being said, letting it pass by while contemplating continuously, then you'll be like a tape recorder. After some time, when you *turn on*, everything will be there. Have no fear that there won't be anything. As soon as you turn on your tape recorder, everything will be there.

on your tape recorder, everything will be there.

Thief and Boxer

People who have wrong understanding practice meditation like a thief who, after having got caught, hires a clever lawyer to get him out of trouble. Once he is out, however, he starts stealing again. Or they are like a boxer who gets beaten up, nurses his wounds, and then goes to fight again which only brings him fresh wounds. And this cycle goes on endlessly. The purpose of meditation is more than just calming ourselves from time to time, getting ourselves out of trouble, but seeing and uprooting the causes which make us not calm to begin with.

Thieves and Murderers

Your body and mind are like a gang of thieves and murderers. They keep trying to drag you into the fire of greed, hatred, and delusion. They cheat you through the pleasures of the senses. They call in sweet melodic voices from the other side of the door, saying, "Oh, come here, please come here." And when you open the door, they shoot you.

Tightly Woven Net

Know and watch your heart. It's pure but emotions come to color it. So let your mind be like a tightly woven net to catch emotions and feelings that come, and investigate them before you react.

Tree

Fostering the practice of Buddhism can be likened to a tree. A tree has roots, a trunk, branches and leaves. Every single leaf and branch, including the trunk, depends on the roots to absorb nutriment and send it up to them. A tree is dependent on the roots for sustenance. We are the same. Our actions and our speech are like the trunk, branches, and twigs. The mind is like the root, which absorbs nutriment and sends it out to sustain them, which in turn bears fruit. Whatever state the mind is in, be it based in wrong view or right view outwardly through our actions and speech. So nurturing Buddhism through the practical application of the Teachings is very important.

Trees Growing Outward

Does anyone order the trees to grow the way they do? They can't talk nor can they move around, and yet they grow away from obstacles. Wherever it's cramped and growing will be difficult, they bend outwards. Trees by nature don't know anything. They act on natural laws, yet they do *know* enough to grow away from danger, to incline toward a suitable place. People are like this. We want to transcend suffering, and if that which we like and that which we don't like are suffering, we should then not go so close to them, not be cramped by them. When we incline toward the Buddha, suffering will lessen and eventually come to a complete end.

Vanity

Worldly people usually speak out of vanity. For example, suppose there was a certain person whom you hadn't seen for a long time, and then one day you happen to meet on the train: "Oh, I'm so glad to see you! I was just thinking to look you up!" Actually it's not so. You hadn't even thought of him at all, but you just say so at the time out of gladness. And so it becomes a lie. Yes, it's lying out of heedlessness. This is a refined form of lying, and people tend to speak like this. This, too, is a defilement which we should practice to get rid of.

Vine

A growing child is like a growing vine. A vine will grow and attach itself to the nearest tree. It won't follow some other tree or form, and it's from that tree that it will get its shape and direction. If the tree is growing straight and upwards, the vine, too, will grow straight and upwards. If the tree is growing crooked and sideways, so will the vine. Understand that your teaching of a child really comes more from how you are and what the child sees than from anything you say. So your practice is not just your own, but also for your children . . . and others around you.

Vulture

Many people who have studied on a university level and attained graduate degrees and worldly success find that there is still something missing in their lives. Although they think high thoughts and are intellectually sophisticated, their hearts are still filled with pettiness and doubt. It's like a vulture: it flies high, but what does it feed on?

Water in an Urn

If we keep on contemplating in meditation, energy will come to us. This is similar to the water in an urn. We put in water and keep it topped up. We keep on filling the urn with water so that the larvae which live in the water don't die. Making effort and doing our everyday practice is just like this. We must keep it topped up.

Water Buffalo

Our thinking follows sense objects and pursues them wherever they go. Yet not any one of the sense objects is substantial. They are all impermanent, unsatisfactory, and empty. When they arise, observe them and see what happens. It is like looking after a buffalo in a rice paddy. When someone looks after a buffalo, he lets it walk around freely, but he keeps an eye on it. If the buffalo goes near the rice plants, he yells at it and the buffalo backs off. If it doesn't obey, it gets to feel the hard end of a stick. The person watching the buffalo can't doze off either, or he'll get up finding the rice plants all eaten away.

The mind is like the buffalo, and the rice plants are like the sense objects. The one who knows is the owner. When observing the mind, the one who knows notices everything. It sees how the mind is when it follows sense objects, and how it is when it doesn't follow them. When the one who knows observes the mind like this, wisdom will arise. When the mind meets an object, it'll grab hold, just like the buffalo will bite on a rice plant when it sees one. So wherever the mind goes, you must watch it. When it goes near the rice plants, shout at it. If it will not obey you, just give it the stick.

Well and Orchard

You'll have to work to find peacefulness in the world. It's like reaching water for a well – it's there but you have to dig for it. Or like an orchard that's already planted – the fruit are there, but you have to pick them. They won't just fall into your mouth.

Wooden Log

One can't separate *samatha* and *vipassana*. *Samatha* is tranquility, *vipassana* is contemplation. In order to contemplate, one must be tranquil, and in order to be tranquil, one must contemplate to know the mind. Wanting to separate them would be like picking up a log of wood in the middle and wanting only one end of the log to come up. Both of its ends must come up at the same time. You can't separate them. In our practice, it isn't necessary to talk of *samatha* or *vipassana*. Just call it the practice of Dhamma, that's enough.

Sweet Papayas

If you don't understand the truth of suffering and how to get rid of it, all the factors of the path will be wrong – wrong speech and action, and wrong practice of concentration. It would be like wanting to travel to a certain

village. You make a mistake and take the wrong road, but you find it comfortable to travel on and so continue walking in the wrong direction. No matter how comfortable and convenient the road may be, however, it won't take you to where you want to go. With even a little intuitive wisdom we will be able to see clearly through the ways of the world. We will come to understand that everything in the world is a teacher. Trees and vines, for example, can reveal the nature of reality to us. With wisdom there is no need to question anyone, no need to study. WE can learn enough from Nature to be enlightened.

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